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ABSTRACT

The goal of synergistic psychology is to synthesize different psychological theories into an explanation of how social, cognitive and biological factors interact in human behavior. Synergism refers to the mutually co-operating action of separate substances which taken together produce an effect greater than that of any component taken alone. The term "synergistic psychology" was suggested by Larry Smolucha in 1988 as a metatheory for synthesizing psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories. The basic theoretical assumption in synergistic psychology is that internalized social interactions become higher mental functions that regulate lower biological functions. The resulting synthesis consists of six points: (1) Vygotskian theory can provide a means of formulating a developmental model of primary and secondary process thought; (2) adults act as mediators of infants' social-cognitive development; (3) internalized social interactions serve self-regulation; (4) imagination can mature into a consciously directed thought process that collaborates with logical thought in creative thinking; (5) there is a non-verbal, unconscious domain in human cognition; and (6) the internalization of social interactions results in the development of self-concept and world view. (Author)

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This paper is an introduction to synergistic psychology. The goal of synergistic psychology is to synthesize different psychological theories into an explanation of how social, cognitive and biological factors interact in human behavior. Synergism refers to the mutually co-operating action of separate substances which taken together produce an effect greater than that of any compnent taken alone. The term 'synergistic psychology' was suggested by Larry Smolucha in 1983 as a metatheory for synthesizing psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories. The basic theoretical assumption in synergistic psychology is that internalized social interactions become higher mental functions that regulate lower biological functions. The resulting synthesis consists of six points. First, Vygotskian theory can provide a means of formulating a developmental model of primary and secondary process thought. Second, adults act as mediators of infants's early object manipulations, marking the beginning of the infants' social-cognitive development. Third, internalized social interactions serve self-regulation. Fourth, imagination can mature into a consciously directed thought process that collaborates with logical thought in creative thinking. Fifth, there is a non-verbal, unconscious domain in human cognition. And sixth, the internalization of social interactions results in the development of self-concept and world view.

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Synergistic Psychology: Toward a Synthesis of Psychoanalytic and Vygotskian Theories

by Francine Smolucha

This paper is an introduction to synergistic psychology. The goal of synergistic psychology is to synthesize different psychological theories into an explanation of how social, cognitive, and biological factors interact in human behavior. Synergistic psychology differs from eclectic psychology which is just an amalgam of theories with no metatheory providing a basis for synthesizing the other theories. Synergistic psychology is a dialectic psychology that incorporates both mechanistic and organismic models of behavior. The term 'synergistic' psychology was suggested by Larry Smolucha in 1988 to denote a metatheory for synthesizing psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories. Synergism refers to the mutually cooperating action of separate substances which taken together produce an effect greater than that of any component taken alone.

The basic theoretical assumption in synergistic psychology is that internalized social interactions become higher mental functions that regulate lower biological functions. This assumption is found in both psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories. In this paper, psychoanalytic object relations theory and Vygotskian theory are synthesized. Using a neutral vantage point like synergistic psychology allows a synthesis to be made that is not inherently biased toward one or the other theory. Thus, the synthesis of psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories produces a new metatheory. Synergistic psychology can also synthesize other theories, such as social learning theory or Piagetian theory, but this task is not undertaken in this paper.

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The following discussion focuses on six issues common to psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theory. The six issues are the following: (1) the interaction of thought and language in cognition (2) the role of adults as mediators of infants' early object manipulations (3) the role of internalized social interactions in the regulation of thought (4) the collaboration of imagination and logical thought in creative thinking (5) the role of non-verbal unconscious thought in cognition (6) the role of internalized social interactions involving speech and object manipulations in the development of self-concept and worldview.

1. The Interaction of Thought and Language.

Both psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories recognize the co-existance and interminglingof non-verbal and verbal thought. Non-verbal thought is characteristic of Freud's concept of primary process thought and Vygotsky's concept of non-verbal thought accompanying tool usage. The verbal forms of thought are Freud's concept of secondary process thought and Vygotsky's concept of verbal thought as the intersection of non-verbal thought and non-intellectual speech (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 47-48).

According to Freud , primary process thought is a form of imaginary wish-fulfillment present at birth. Primary process thought serves the pleasure principle rather than the reality principle and has no developmental history. Vygotsky explicitly disagrees with Freud's concept of primary process thought as a natural thought process found in infants and in animals (Vygotsky, 1932/1960, p.334-335). Vygotsky argues that the most primitive forms of thought would have no survival value if they

were directed toward imaginary wish-fulfillment rather than realistic problem-solving. Vygotsky suggests that primitive thought is realistic and social, and that autistic thought or fantasy thinking is a later development.

According to Vygotsky thought originates as a non-verbal cognitive activity accompanying object manipulations and tool usage. This non-verbal thought intersects with speech activity, between one and two years of age, producing verbal thought. At first verbal thought is an external social interaction between the child and adult care-takers, but gradually during the preschool years it becomes internalized. At about 7-years of age fully internalized speech is possible and this inner speech now serves self-regulation and allows one to consciously direct other thought processes such as memory, problem-solving, and imagination. Vygotsky defines higher mental functions as thought processes that are consciously directed by means of inner speech. Clarification is needed in Vygotskian theory regarding the verbal thought of the preschool child, which is neither an elementary biological function nor a higher mental function.

While non-verbal thought intersects with speech to form verbal thought, verbal thought never fully encompasses the non-verbal domain. Vygotsky states "There is a vast area of thought that has no direct relation to speech. The thinking manifested in the use of tools belongs in this area, as does practical intellect in general..." (1962, p. 47).

Further clarification is also needed in Vygotskian theory regarding the development of imagination (see Smolucha, 1988 for translations of Vygotsky's writings on creative imagination). Vygotsky distinguishes between reproductive imagination used in memory and combinatory imagination used in creative thinking. Several questions remain to be answered. First do reproductive and combinatory imagination exist as non-verbal thought? Do they originate as non-verbal elementary mental functions? What is their relationship to verbal thought? and how do they come to be regulated by inner speech?

Regarding the first question, Vygotsky makes contradictory statements. He refers to the existance of imagination in animals (1930/1967, p.8) but later argues that imagination requires speech to separate it from perception (1932/1960, p. 342-343). Vygotsky is explicit, however, in stating that imagination does become a higher mental function (1931/1984, p.210;p.215). Smolucha (1988) interprets Vygotsky's theory as proposing that creative imagination originates in the child's make-believe play and through social interactions with adults and older children it matures into a higher mental function. During adolescence imagination collaborates with logical thought in creative thinking, which reaches fruition in adulthood.

Vygotsky's theory of creative imagination provides a framework for a developmental theory of primary process thought. It also provides a framework for a developmental theory of secondary process thought.

In psychoanalytic theory, secondary process thought is an ego function and as such manifests itself around 7-years of age when the ego gains autonomy from the id and superego. This coincides with the time when inner speech first is internalized according to Vygotsky. Freud does not give a developmental account of the formation of secondary process thought and its origins in infancy and development during the preschool years remain obscure.

2. The Role of Adults as Mediators of Infants' Early Object Manipulations.

Both contmeporary psychoanalysis (ego psychology and object relations theory) and Vygotskian theory ascribe to the adult a mediating role in infants' early object relations. Among psychoanalytic theories, the theories of Winnicott (1971) and Mahler (1975) are prominent. However, many psychoanalysts have contributed to the formation of ego psychology and object relations theory (see the review by Blanck & Blanck, 1979). The concept of the adult as mediator of the infant's object relations is also found in Vygotsky's works (1932/1960b, 1929/1981, 1933/1984b) and in contemporary Soviet activity theory (for a review of Soviet deveopmental psychology see Valsiner, 1988).

From the psychoanalytic perspective the major developmental issue during infancy is separation-individuation. The infant gradually differentiates a sense of self as distinct from the primary care-taker. During this process a sense of an objective world of separate objects and people is formed.

Soviet activity theory, derived from Vygotskian theory, proposes that object manipulations in a social context give rise to concepts of self, others, and objects. The main difference between psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories of infancy is that psychoanalysts assume that there is a natural state of autism during the first month of infancy when the infant is neither social nor reality oriented.

Vygotsky, on the other hand, describes humans as social beings from birth on. In Vygotsky's words "human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (1933/1978, p.88) and that "learning and development are inter-related from the very first days of a child's life" (1933/1978, p.84).

A synthesis of psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theory necessitates abandoning the concept of a natural state of autism during infancy and instead viewing the infant as a social being. This is supported by contemporary research on infancy which has provided evidence that infants have innate perceptual processes that attune them to social interactions (refer to Stern, 1985).

3. <u>The Role of Internalized Social Interactions in the Regulation of Thought.</u>

According to Freud, the superego is formed through the internalization of a parental role model. While Freud acknowledged the role of inner speech in the functioning of the superego, he used the metaphor of oral ingestion to describe the process of internalization (Freud, 1914/1957, p.118; 1921/1959, p.39-42; 1923/1960, p.18-20; 1933/1965, p.62-64). Vygotsky's theory of inner speech

can greatly enhance our understanding of superego formation and functioning, in addition to providing a scientific basis for the process.

Vygotsky was the first psychologist to focus on the development of self-regulatory processes. Since Vygotsky's death, Soviet and Western developmental psychology have extended our understanding of self-regulation during infancy and childhood. One important issue is the nature of non-verbal forms of self-regulation during infancy (see Stern, 1985). Another issue concerns identifying how different types of regulation of the child by another person leads to the development of specific cognitive functions. According to Vygotsky, social interactions with others lead to the development of higher mental functions by creating a zone of proximal development in which the child performs at a higher level than he would by himself. Applying Vygotsky's concepts of inner speech and the zone of proximal development to the psychoanalytic concepts of superego and transference in therapy could expand the scope of both theories.

4. The Interaction of Imagination and Logical Thought in Creative Thinking

Both Freud and Vygotsky recognize that imagination and logical thought work together in creative thinking. They also identify children's play as a precursor of adult creativity (Freud, 1908/1958; Vygotsky 1930/1967; 1931/1984; 1932/1960). For Freud, as mentioned earlier, imagination is a product of primary process thought and as such can not be consciously directed and has no developmental history.

Vygotsky, on the other hand, viewed creative imagination as a higher mental function that developed out of children's play. As a higher mental function, imagination could be consciously directed by means of inner speech. Vygotsky, further, suggested that during adolescence imagination collaborates with logical thought to produce a higher level of creativity that matures in adulthood.

Vygotsky's theory provides a framework for the development of primary process thought into a consciously directed thought process that can collaborate with secondary process thought in creative thinking. The Smoluchas have been synthesizing psychoanalytic, Vygotskian, and Piagetian theories into a theory of the development of creative imagination (Smolucha, 1982; Smolucha & Smolucha, 1983, 1985a,b, 1986a,b). In 1982, F. Smolucha proposed a psychoanalytic theory of creative imagination in which primary process thought originated in children's play and matured into a consciously directed process that could collaborate with secondary process thought. The attempt to establish a contemporary cognitive psychology for this theory led to a synthesis of Piagetian and Vygotskian concepts and the translation of Vygotsky's papers on creative imagination (Smolucha, 1985, Smolucha & Smolucha, 1986a).

5. <u>The Role of Non-verbal Unconscious Thought in Cognition.</u>

It is not generally know that Vygotsky acknowledged the existance of a unconscious area of mentation (1930/1982). While Vygotsky's theory of the unconscious was never fully developed, it is possible

to extend his concepts into a formulation compatible with psychoanalysis. Vygotsky stated that unconscious thought is non-verbal or unverbalized thought and that it is the process of verbalization that brings experience into consciousness. He stated that this is in essence what Freud is saying and what the process of psychoanalytic therapy entails.

Vygotsky's model of verbal thought as the intersection of non-verbal thought and non-intellectual speech (1934/1962, p.47-48) can also illuminate our understanding of his concept of the unconscious. The domain of non-verbal thought, which comprises sensorimotor thought and perhaps some reproductive imagination, is in essence unconscious. It remains to be seen whether non-verbal conscious thought is a viable concept that Vygotsky has overlooked.

From a Vygotskian point of view, in psychoanalytic therapy, the patient externalizes internal speech in order to become conscious of it and also internalizes a new inner speech to help him become conscious of previously internalized speech patterns and to regulate them.

6. The Role of Internalized Social Interactions in the Development of Self Concept and World View

In the Pedalogy of the Adolescent (1931/1984) Vygotsky stated that child development culminates in adolescence with the differentiation of a concept of self and a concept of world view. Further study is needed to clarify the relationship between Vygotsky's concepts and the psychoanalytic concepts of ego and object relations. Contemporary psychoanalysis describes the development of the body-ego and object relations in infancy and how these impact

on adult functioning. This work could be integrated with Vygotsky's description of the adolescent's more abstract concepts of self and world-view.

Because the psychoanalytic literature is available in english, the psychoanalytic concepts of self and object relations are not elaborated on here. However, since the entire body of Vygotsky's works are not available in english, the following passages are presented here. In the conclusion to the History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions (1931/1960), Vygotsky described his concepts of self (he used the russian term for 'personality') and world view. According to Vygotsky,

> The attempt to synthesize an overview of cultural development ought to derive from the following basic assumptions:
>
> First, in essence the process of cultural development is characterized as the development of the child's personality and world view. The latter concept is insufficient as a defining and scientific term. It is possible that in the light of further research these terms will be replaced with another concept. However, even if it keeps approximately the same meaning, its definition ought to be made more precise and should be more clearly distinguished from other similar concepts. For the time being, we introduce these concepts for preliminary consideration as general concepts, encompassing two important sides of the cultural development of the child.
>
> Personality as used here has a more precise meaning than in common usage. We don't count here all signs of individuality, distinguishing one individual from another, comprising his uniqueness or relating it to this or another defining type. We are inclined to place an equal sign between the personality of the child and his cultural development. Personality, in this way, is a social concept, it encompasses the over-natural history in human beings. It is not innate but arises as the result of cultural development, therefore 'personality' is a historical concept. It encompasses the unity of behavior, which is distinguishable as a sign of mastery (refer back to the chapter on volition). In this sense a correlate of personality would be the relationship between primitive and higher reactions, and in this regard a new concept corresponding to this is introduced to us from the area of psychopathology established by Krechmer.

> Under world view we are also not inclined to consider any kind of logical, thought out, or formulated in a conscious system, view of the world or its important parts. We are inclined to use this word only in synthesizing meaning, corresponding to personality on the subjective plane. World view - is that which characterizes behavior of the individual in the whole, cultural relationship of the individual to the external world. In this sense animals don't have a world view, and in this sense a child does not have it at the moment of birth. In the first year of life, sometimes up to puberty, worldview in the strict sense of the word is absent in the child. Often this is rapidly a world of action, then a world view. In this way, we include in the term "world view" just the objective meaning of the means of relating to the world, which the child has (Vygotsky, 1931/1960, p. 317, trans. by F. Smolucha).

Conclusion: The basic outline for a synthesis of psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theories has been described. The resulting metatheory, synergistic psychology describes how social interactions become internalized cognitive functions that regulate lower biological functions. Six points of intersection between psychoanalytic and Vygotskian theory were examined and a synthesis proposed.

Regarding the first point, the interaction of thought and language, Freud's theory of primary process thought as the natural primitive thought process characterizing infancy is no longer viable. Primary process thought should be examined as one possible elementary mental function, that co-exists with social and reality oriented thought in infancy. A developmental theory of primary process thought is needed to study how speech and other social interactions become internalized in imagination. The maturation of imagination into a consciously directed 'higher mental function' needs further study.

A developmental model of secondary process thought is also needed and research by the Vygotskian school on the development of verbal thought, the internalization of speech, and thinking in concepts could help in this regard. Finally, the collaboration of primary and secondary process thought in both healthy and abnormal cognitive functioning can best be understood through a collaboration of psychoanalytic and Vygotskian concepts.

The second point, the role of adults as mediators of infants' early object manipulations, bears directly on the developmental models of primary and secondary process thought just discussed. Stated in Vygotskian terminology, the task is to identify how early social interactions affect the development of higher mental functions such as imagination and logical thought.

The internalization of social interactions involving both speech and object manipulations, occurring throughout infancy and early childhood, are the development roots of all higher mental functions including self-regulation (the third point) and creative thinking (the fourth point); and, the basis of self concept and world view (the sixth point).

The fifth point, the role of non-verbal unconscious thought in cognition, is the least developed aspect of Vygotsky's theory. An understanding of unconscious thought processes is essential for an understanding of pathological behavior, as the psychoanalysts have demonstrated. Even with a developmental model of primary process there is still an area of non-verbal cognition that is not consciously directed, as well as inner speech which is not always consciously directed. Here psychoanalytic insights into the nature of the unconscious can enhance the VYgotskian theory of the conscious.

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